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ABSTRACT

This report highlights key issues behind the public's desire for better teaching, following up on discussions by leading policymakers, educators, researchers, and communications experts about what role they can play in developing a quality teaching force. This diverse group met to describe key elements of quality teaching and to develop strategies for mobilizing public support for recruiting, preparing, developing, and retaining high-quality teachers. Data from this meeting suggest that the public believes quality teaching coupled with accountability for student learning is critical to educational reform. There is, however, little political consensus about the best approaches to obtaining a higher quality teaching force. Policymakers are experimenting with strategies focused on all aspects of teacher quality. Educators, researchers, policymakers, foundation officials, and school and district educators must work collaboratively to build a coherent strategy and message if they are to mobilize public support for quality teaching initiatives. This paper discusses what the public wants for new and current teachers, and it notes barriers to quality teaching (teacher shortage, teacher qualifications, and teaching outside the area of expertise). It describes common beliefs related to improving quality teaching, discusses how policymakers are reacting, and presents recommendations for policymakers, researchers, educators, and foundations. (Contains 20 endnotes.) (SM)

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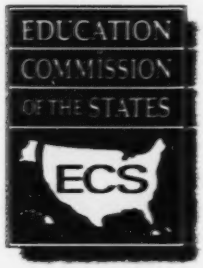
MOBILIZING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR POLICY INITIATIVES THAT ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

Final Report to

The Rockefeller Foundation

Submitted by

Education Commission of the States



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MOBILIZING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR POLICY INITIATIVES THAT ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

In August 1999, the Education Commission of the States (ECS), in collaboration with the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, brought leading policymakers, educators, researchers and communications experts together to describe key elements of "quality teaching"[1] and to develop strategies for mobilizing public support for recruiting, preparing, developing and retaining high-quality teachers. This report highlights the key issues behind the public's desire for better teaching and follows up on discussions about what roles policymakers, researchers, educators, the public and foundation officials can play in developing a quality teaching force.[2]

An analysis of polling data[3] prepared for the ECS conference ("Strengthening Public and Policymaker Support for Teacher Quality Initiatives") and discussions at the meeting itself suggest the following:

- The public believes quality teaching coupled with accountability for student learning is a critical ingredient of education reform.

- There is, however, little political consensus about the best approaches to obtain a higher quality teaching force. Policymakers are experimenting with strategies focused on all aspects of teacher quality, from practices associated with recruiting through professional development to new incentives and reward structures for teachers. While some research exists to support certain policy components, none to date provides policymakers the guidance they need to determine which approach best fits their state context.

- Educators, researchers, policymakers, foundation officials, and school and district educators must work collaboratively to build a coherent strategy and message if they are to mobilize public support for quality teaching initiatives.

The Public Supports Quality Teaching

Across the country, policymakers and the public are debating how to improve the quality of the nation's teaching force. While Americans generally give teachers good ratings for the job they are doing, they are concerned about "bad" teachers, defined as those who do not know their subject matter, cannot pass student assessment tests themselves, are uninvolved with students and/or lack passion for curricula.[4] According to Public Agenda, 42% of all high school students and an even greater number of parents think there are too many bad teachers in the nation's classrooms.[5]

Polls show the public supports efforts to improve teaching because it believes that high-quality teachers improve student learning and school performance.[6] For example, in a 1997 *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll, 82% of the public said the "recruitment and retention of better teachers" was the most important measure for improving public schools, more effective than investing in computers or smaller class size. A 1998 study conducted for *Education Week* found that parents,

taxpayers and educators view "teacher qualifications" as the second most important indicator of how schools are performing (topped only by school safety).[7] The review of public opinion survey research done for this conference found the public, in fact, is willing to support salary increases and incentives to promote the recruitment, professional development and retention of quality teachers.[8]

What the Public Wants for New Teachers

Public support for traditional quality teaching policy initiatives, such as higher beginning teacher salaries or campaigns to recruit well-qualified minorities is coupled by a strong desire for accountability throughout the teacher development process. In the 1999 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, 97% of persons contacted said teachers should be required to prove their knowledge of the subject(s) they will teach before they are hired.[9] (Although 44 states require teaching candidates to pass statewide certification examinations, it is not clear whether these exams meet the public's expectations for subject-area competence.)

The public emphasis on subject-matter knowledge differs from that of the people who train teachers. Public Agenda found that only 57% of education professors said it was "absolutely essential" for teachers to be "deeply knowledgeable" about the content they will teach.[10] On the other hand, 84% of education professors said teachers should be "lifetime learners" and committed to "constantly upgrading their skills." Without more support from school of education faculty, it is unlikely that teachers will gain the increased content knowledge that the public desires.

What the Public Wants for Current Teachers

To assure that teachers have adequate subject-area knowledge, more than three-fourths of the public strongly favors testing practicing teachers every few years, according to Wirthlin Worldwide, an international survey research company.[11] A 1998 survey found that 73% of Massachusetts residents favor testing all teachers every five years on the subject matter they teach and dismissing teachers who fail the tests twice (59% of new teachers failed the state's most recent examination).[12]

Polls show the public also supports more and better professional development for practicing teachers. More than six in 10 persons would like to lengthen the school year and provide more time during the school day for professional development opportunities. Seven in 10 would like to see more money budgeted for quality professional development opportunities.[13]

Public support is slowly growing for tying teacher pay to student achievement. According to a 1998 Public Agenda poll, 53% of parents and 60% of employers agreed that "tying improved academic performance to financial incentives for teachers and principals" is a good idea. In a Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll the same year, 40% of teachers supported "merit pay," up from 32% in 1984.[14]

Educators and political observers are closely monitoring Denver's pay-for-performance pilot program. This program, currently under development, provides elementary and middle school

teachers with a bonus of about $1,000 if their students meet certain goals on one of three achievement measures. Though teachers have expressed concerns over certain aspects of the plan, such as assessment process, class schedules, curriculum alignment and parental involvement, many support the program. Cincinnati; Dallas; Houston; Columbus, Ohio; Douglas County, Colorado; Minneapolis; Rochester, New York; and the State of Florida also are implementing alternative forms of performance-based pay programs.

The public, however, is reluctant to judge teachers exclusively on student test results, recognizing that factors such as previous teachers, family background, parent involvement and student readiness to learn affect how well students do in school. In a 1998 poll done for *Recruiting New Teachers*, 66% of the public said teaching salaries should not be based solely on student test performance.[15] And, in a 1999 ICR Survey Research Group survey, 77% supported paying teachers more, with almost the same percentage (75%) saying they would be willing to pay $200-$500 more a year in taxes to support teachers raises and other improvements.

They also said it is unfair to punish teachers for low student achievement. Until states and districts are able to show individual student gains year to year and to determine under which teachers' supervision students make the most progress, this belief is likely to continue.

Barriers to Quality Teaching

In spite of the recognition by both the public and policymakers that the nation needs a high-quality teaching force, a number of obstacles stand in the way. Having enough teachers, ensuring they are well-qualified and assigning them to teach subjects for which they are prepared are all different aspects of the problem.

First, the nation faces, if not an outright shortage, an unequal distribution of qualified and promising teachers. The U.S. Department of Education reports that public schools nationwide will need 2.2 million new teachers over the seven years – 200,000 a year -- to teach 52.7 million students, the highest number of students ever to attend public schools. Southern and Western states will be most seriously affected by the projected growth of school-aged children, with increases predicted to hit 10% and 17% respectively (compared to 6% for the Northeast and only 1% in the Midwest).

The shortage of quality teachers is a particular concern for large urban and rural areas, which have the greatest difficulty recruiting and retaining good teachers. Urban districts in California and Florida have been forced to recruit in states where there is a known over-supply of teachers, such as Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and parts of the Northeast. New York City is importing math, science and bilingual teachers from other countries, and recruiting teachers from Massachusetts and Puerto Rico.

In the next decade, the teacher shortage also will be exacerbated by an estimated 7% of teachers retiring or leaving teaching each year.[16] Further, significant shortages are expected in certain sectors and disciplines, such as mathematics, science, bilingual and special education.[17]

Finally, after completing their preparation program, many potential teachers are deciding not to

go into teaching at all and are choosing alternative careers and professions. Their reasons include higher pay and status, better career advancement and promotions, and better working conditions elsewhere. Roger Erskine, former head of the Seattle Education Association, noted at the ECS/NCREL conference that a special master's-level teacher training program at the University of Washington loses almost two-thirds of its top teacher prospects to Microsoft. Richard Laine of the Illinois Business Roundtable suggested that part of the increasing undesirability of the teaching profession can be attributed to educators' and policymakers' inability to deal with market realities. For example, in Illinois, a veteran teacher certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards still earns less than $40,000 a year in some communities.

Ensuring that well-qualified teachers populate the nation's classrooms is a second goal in improving teaching quality. The first place to address this barrier is in the quality of teacher preparation programs. Critics contend these programs need to do a better job of screening candidates, preparing students to teach to state and district achievement standards, and giving them more field experience outside the college classroom. The programs also need to ensure that graduates are prepared in their chosen content areas, are trained to use technology in their classrooms, and possess the skills needed to evaluate students and to manage their classrooms.

While many teacher preparation programs are moving to address these criticisms, the change is slow for several reasons. The incentive structure for higher education faculty rewards publishing rather than teaching, education schools often lack status within the university, and typical preparation programs do not provide "real" classroom experience. Concerns over teacher shortages and the quality of preparation programs have given rise to alternative routes to teacher preparation in a number of states. Though some alternative route programs have received positive reviews, their overall quality still is considered uneven.

Another obstacle to quality teaching, particularly in the public's view, is the fact that many teachers are being asked to teach subjects for which they are inadequately prepared. A National Center for Education Statistics report found that almost one-third of high school math teachers have neither a major nor a minor in math or any related field. Similarly, almost one-fourth of all high school English teachers have neither a major nor minor in English or any related field.[18] This problem is even worse in schools that serve a large proportion of low-income and minority children.

Forging a Political Consensus

How can such obstacles to quality teaching be overcome? The first step is to define what quality teaching is and what stands in its way. Polling results and discussions with policymakers, teachers and the public show there is common ground on several principles related to improving quality teaching:

- The nation's classrooms must be staffed with better-prepared teachers, which the public believes are those who have adequate content knowledge in the field in which they are teaching.

- Traditional teacher education programs are failing to produce the numbers of well-qualified

teachers the nation needs.

- Most state systems of teacher testing and certification fail to ensure teacher quality.
- Support for beginning teachers is essential, as is effective professional development for practicing teachers.

Beyond agreement on these broad principles, however, there are significantly different views about how to approach policy related to teacher quality. Two approaches have come to dominate the debate between educators and policymakers over the specific remedies needed to upgrade the quality of the nation's teacher workforce.

One view, represented by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, calls for a comprehensive approach that reforms and aligns the major components of the teacher preparation pipeline. In this system, quality controls are applied throughout the teacher preparation and certification process. Teacher preparation programs must demonstrate their quality through accreditation; aspiring teachers must meet specified requirements to graduate from these programs and move on to advanced stages of certification or licensure. Both content and pedagogical knowledge are emphasized.

Concerns about this approach focus on its cost and the length of time needed to achieve measurable results. For policymakers, an additional concern is the highly prescriptive nature of this approach, which recommends measures that may contradict long-standing or well-supported state or local policies.

> Connecticut, which has one of the highest proportions of teachers with both a degree in their field and a license, is attacking the quality issue on multiple fronts. The state committed more than $300 million to (a) raise standards for teacher education and licensing, (b) make teachers' salaries competitive with other occupations that require similar preparation and (c) reduce inequalities among the state's school districts by equalizing teacher salaries.
>
> New teachers must complete a five-year preparation program with a rigorous set of education courses. They can be hired only after passing a test of basic skills and subject-matter knowledge.
>
> Once they are teaching, teachers must enter a two-year induction program that combines mentoring with performance-based assessments. These teachers eventually receive a master's degree for a continuing professional license.
>
> While the initial program has been refined, teacher shortages have been eliminated and Connecticut teachers continue to rank among the best in the nation.[19] Students made impressive gains from 1992-1996, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and Connecticut now ranks at or near the top among all states on this assessment.

The second approach, put forward by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, calls for school and

teacher accountability tied directly to student learning. The only requirement to enter teaching would be demonstrated subject-matter competency; the individual school principal is otherwise vested with the responsibility — and accountability — for determining and ensuring the competence of his or her teaching staff. This approach argues that skills leading to certification will be developed adequately in supervised teaching experiences and related coursework.

Critics cite two problems, however. The instrumentation and data-management infrastructure needed to link student performance to teacher performance is in its infancy; and most principals lack training and experience to run a performance-oriented school.

Texas was one of the first states to link teacher performance to student achievement. The two-year-old Professional Development Appraisal System evaluates teachers in eight areas, including their school's rating on such indicators as student attendance and dropout rates, and on students' performance on the state's assessment (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills).

The state teachers' union has opposed using the TAAS scores. The state education department, however, says signs are positive. A similar plan for principals went into effect this school year, and a plan for superintendents is in the works.

Texas' accountability system also reaches to higher education, with teacher education programs evaluated on their graduates' scores on certification exams. Programs that repeatedly score poorly will lose their state accreditation.

Source: Education Week, Quality Counts '99

While research has been done on elements of each of these approaches, none compares the two or their implied policy strategies. As a consequence, policymakers are caught between opposing models, with radically different policy implications and with little guidance to help them make decisions about what will work best in their states or communities.

How Policymakers Are Reacting

Lacking agreement on an integrated approach, policymakers are experimenting with incentives for results in key areas or disciplines. Incentive programs allow policymakers the flexibility to invest in pilot programs without suffering huge political, education or financial losses if the programs are not successful. Furthermore, unions have been less likely to oppose these programs because they do not require structural changes to the compensation system.

The drawback of incentives, however, is that they can be costly in the long term if the incentives are made available to every teacher, school and district that qualifies or if they do not achieve their intended results.

Examples of the incentive approach include:

- Several states offer hiring bonuses, ranging from $1,000 in Maryland to a record $20,000 in Massachusetts.
- Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota and Pennsylvania forgive student loan obligations for new teachers.

- Baltimore offers $5,000 in housing bonuses to new teachers willing to work in "hard-to-staff" areas.
- Many states are rewarding teachers for achieving certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Oklahoma, Virginia, Alabama and Mississippi offer $5,000 or more bonus and reimbursement costs for national certification.
- Forty-one states and the District of Columbia offer alternative routes to teaching careers for professionals making career changes, military personnel facing retirement and former teachers wanting to return to the classroom.
- Thirty-six states have special programs to recruit minorities into teaching. The programs typically provide financial incentives such as salary increases, cash bonuses and reimbursements for the cost of education and training. Los Angeles offers a $5,000 salary differential to bilingual teachers.

Recommendations

From the polling data, it is clear that the time is right to mobilize the public behind an effort to improve the quality of teaching in the nation's schools. The public support for improving teaching creates the opportunity for policymakers, researchers, educators and foundation officials to take some risks in creating alternative strategies that will improve teacher quality. None of these groups, however, can accomplish this by working alone. Each has a part to play.

Policymakers:

To get public support for efforts to improve the quality of teaching in their states and districts, policymakers can take the following steps to connect policy discussions with public opinion:

- ***Develop long-term strategies for recruiting, training and retaining quality teachers.*** Policymakers should work with educators, researchers and foundations to develop comprehensive strategies to recruit, retain and develop high-quality teachers. Without a consistent strategy and consensus for action, policymakers and administrators will only be able to offer stop-gap measures, rather than long-term solutions to enhance teaching quality.

- ***Use teachers to develop public support for improving teaching quality.*** Unlike politicians, teachers are considered among the most "credible" public figures in society, second only to Supreme Court justices.[20] By finding out what teachers think, and sharing their stories, policymakers are more likely to make inroads in mobilizing public support for strategies to recruit and retain high-quality teachers.

- ***Focus on professional development.*** Policymakers' thinking must go beyond recruiting teachers to finding ways to get quality teachers to stay, particularly in hard-to-staff schools. More attention and resources are needed to retain and develop the existing workforce, a step the public believes is necessary.

- ***Don't blame the teachers***. The public does not think teachers are solely to blame for poor

student learning. The public sees factors such as previous teachers, family background, parent involvement and student readiness as influential in student success. It therefore favors offering incentives to improve student performance rather than focusing on "punishing" bad teachers and low-performing schools.

- ***Fund research to study and evaluate results of current strategies to improve teaching quality.*** While policymakers are beginning to take action that they believe will enhance teacher quality, they need accurate, up-to-date research-based information about what quality teaching is, how it relates to increased student achievement, how policy strategies being tried in other states are working, how long various strategies take to show impact and what they cost.

Researchers:

Researchers play a significant role in helping policymakers and educators undertake strategies known to improve teaching quality. Research needs to do the following:

- ***Describe the characteristics of quality teaching.*** Belden and Plattner found "there is little survey data to describe what high-quality teachers are." Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that parents work hard to ensure their children are assigned to the best teachers. Researchers need to describe the characteristics of high-quality teachers that correlate with student achievement and investigate how the public judges teacher quality.

- ***Compare alternative state approaches to increasing teaching quality.*** There is an urgent need for policy research to determine what strategies and approaches reap the best returns on investments in teacher quality. In addition, further documentation of the relationship between student learning and teacher quality is needed.

Districts and Schools:

Teachers, principals and school boards need to realize how strongly the public values its teaching resources. They also need to take seriously the push for greater accountability on the part of schools, staff and students.

To get the public to support efforts to improve teaching quality, local board members and educators should consider steps such as the following:

- ***Experiment with contracts and reward structures that tie improved academic performance to financial incentives for teachers and principals.*** Again, this does not mean holding teachers solely responsible for student learning, but it does mean making them more accountable for it.

- ***Define effective professional development, set aside time for it to occur and reallocate resources to see that it happens.*** This step is likely to be popular because the public believes a commitment is needed to increase the skills of current teachers, as well as teacher candidates. At the same time, the public needs to be understand that the most effective

professional development must occur during the course of the school day and that their children will not learn less if teachers have more time to learn themselves.

Foundations:

Foundations have invested in the development of many approaches to teaching quality. Now it is time to fund the cross-state and cross-district policy research about which strategies are working. These policy research results are important to policymakers trying to decide what will work best in their state or district.

Conclusion

The current and future shortages of teachers, coupled with the high public expectations for student achievement, have produced an urgent need to recruit, retain, develop and train high-quality teachers. While the public supports policies that will improve the quality of teachers and education, that support is constrained by a desire for accountability throughout a teacher's lifetime. Mobilizing the public will require the collaborative work of researchers, policymakers, foundation officials and, perhaps most importantly, teachers.

Prepared by Robert Palaich and Michael G. Lacy, with Sherry Freeland Walker and Michael Allen.

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[1]Willis Hawley, former director of the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, argues that the mission should be defined as improving "quality teaching" rather than "teacher quality," because the former stresses systemic concerns of schools, achievement and policy, while the latter stresses individual characteristics of teachers.

[2]Recent surveys by ECS and the National Conference of State Legislatures show that "quality teaching" issues continue to be among legislators' top education priorities. It is also the focus of Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer's tenure as 1999-2000 ECS chairman.

[3] In *Teacher Quality: A Review of Existing Survey Data*, Nancy Belden of Belden Russonello & Stewart and Andy Plattner of A-Plus Communications conducted an exhaustive search of the most recent public opinion survey research (1995 -1999).

[4] *Teacher Quality: A Review of Existing Survey Data.*

[5] Public Agenda (1996). *Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools.*

[6]Similarly, the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NFTAC) found that quality teaching improves schools and aids school reform.

[7] In 1998, Belden Russonello & Stewart conducted a study for *Education Week* involving 260 parents, taxpayers and educators in "electronic groups" in three cities. This information was included in *Teacher Quality: A Review of Existing Survey Data.*

[8] *Teacher Quality: A Review of Existing Survey Data.*

[9] *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* (1999, September).

[10] Public Agenda (1997). *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education.*

[11] Wirthlin Worldwide (1997, March). National Poll.

[12] Opinion Dynamics (1998). Survey of Massachusetts adult residents conducted for the Massachusetts Insight Education and Research Institute.

[13] Louis Harris and David Haselkorn (1998, September). *The Essential Profession: A National Survey of Public Attitudes Toward Teaching, Educational Opportunity and School Reform.* Conducted for Recruiting New Teachers.

[14] *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* (1998).

[15] Louis Harris and David Haselkorn (1998, September). *The Essential Profession: A National Survey of Public Attitudes Toward Teaching, Educational Opportunity and School Reform.* Conducted for Recruiting New Teachers.

[16] National Center for Education Statistics. *Projections of Education Statistics to 2007.*

[17] Less than 40% of mathematics and science majors who prepared to enter the teaching profession actually applied for a teaching position the year after graduation. The need for special education teachers is expected to increase by 59% and secondary teachers by 22% over the next decade. State Higher Education Executive Officers (1998, June). "Addressing the Shortages of Teachers – What Are the Critical Issues?" *Preparing Quality Teachers: Issues and Trends in the States.*

[18] Ingersoll, Richard (1996). *Out-of –field Teaching and Education Equality.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

[19] National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996, September). *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future.* Also see: Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Research, Evaluation and Assessment. *Research Bulletin, School Year 1990-91*, No. 1. Hartford, CT: Bureau of Research and Teacher Assessment.

[20] Research/Strategy/Management (1999, June). "The National Credibility Index." The National Credibility Index was created in 1998 for the Public Relations Society of America Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. The study found teachers are more trusted than media and elected officials.